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BEAUTY.

Il più nelli' uno.

MICHAEL ANGELO.

I. THE ARTIST'S THEME.

FRESH from the Maker's hand she came to earth,
The goddess Beauty, queen of all the throngs;
The birdling's plumage, and the songster's song
Alike attest where she has stamped her worth.
Passive or active, native or acquired,
She holds the heart, the mind, the ear, the eye,
And Faith stands voucher she can never die;
But live again in heavenly guise attired.
As fouler mediums portray that bright
Ethereal miracle of seven-fold light,—
This life of ours doth seem a veil obscure
To make, as with those hues, her members seem
All scattered, while it is the artist's theme
To re-unite them in a model pure.

II. THE LODESTAR.

Clothed in her vestal garb, or rich, or poor,
Intrinsic Beauty hath a mission here;
She entereth the palace of the peer,
Is housed within the cottage of the poor,—
A ministering visitant to cheer
The rayless gloom of deep despondent hearts,
A brightener of hours that even starts
Accordant pulses, as if God drew near.
Rising like incense from our thoughts and creeds,
Her blest aroma floods the air of life,
Embalms our actions, sanctifies our deeds,
The floating plume above the daily strife,—
She gleams incessant on the artist's chart,
The homage of his soul, the lodestar of his Art.

III. HER ENEMY.

Krieg führt der Wits auf ewig mit dem Schönen. SCHILLER.

Wit battles Beauty with her loud halloo,
And heartlessly with sparkling weapon mars
Those fair, soft features, while she counts the scars
To tell her glory like a boastful shrew.
She leads the legions of a bantling crew,
A very Mephistoph the locks and bars
Of knowledge to assail with her rude jars,
Deceiving into folly not a few.
Alas! the heart's blood will but coldly run,
To see false wisdom hold the dagger up,
With gore-drops dripping on the victim one,
And not a friend to pass the soothing cup,
Or e'en forbid the orgies, that would dare
In victim-gee, make mock of her despair.

SALISBURY CATHEDRAL, which was finished 600 years ago, has even a spruce and modern air, and its spire is the highest in England. I know not why, but I had been more struck with one of no fame at Coventry, which rises 300 feet from the ground with the lightness of a mullein-plant, and not at all implicated with the church. Salisbury is now esteemed the culmination of the Gothic art in England, as the buttresses are fully unmasked, and honestly detailed from the sides of the pile. The interior of the cathedral is obstructed by the organ in the middle, acting like a screen. I know not why, in real architecture, the hunger of the eye for a length of line is so rarely gratified. The rule of art is that a colonnade is more beautiful, the longer it is, and that *ad infinitum*. And the nave of a church is seldom so long that it need be divided by a screen."—R. W. Emerson.

"To see England well needs a hundred years. It is well packed and well saved; it is stuffed full, in all corners and crevices, with towns, churches, villas, palaces, hospitals, and charity houses. In the history of art it is a long way from a Cromleech to York Minster; yet all the intermediate steps may still be traced in this all preserving island."—R. W. Emerson.

METAPHYSICS AND BEAUTY.

WHEN a man talks about that which he does not comprehend to a person who does not understand him, the substance of their mutual entertainment is termed metaphysics. So says Sidney Smith.* Now there is no subject oftener seized upon as a peg on which to hang metaphysical thought than Beauty. Beauty, to many thinkers, seems to be an elevating as well as an exhilarating gas, exciting the brain and gestating ideas which convert the mind into an intellectual balloon, and this suspended before the curious eye of the many fixes the attention of all "wondering mortals that fall back to gaze upon it". But what do its slender threads support? A poor lone mortal beneath, a restless and impatient being, who seems to be discontented with the earth and thus takes an aerial flight, solely to shiver and shake in the freedom of mental clouds. We cannot help but speculate upon the *cui bono* of the aeronaut's excursion; we know he is certain to descend somewhere and, if we are humane, we are always anxious to know how and where he may alight; ergo, we consider a metaphysician as only an aeronaut in the realms of thought. And yet these voyagers sometimes report good things. No one will deny but that their position is an elevated one, and that they see many things we do not see, whatever may be the value of their vision. We are willing to admit that an occasional trip with a metaphysical pilot is useful. He shows us through the fog he is familiar with, attractive islands, sublime peaks and magnificent snow-mountains of vapor that charm and delight us. But, on the other hand, we tire of companionship with the elements; the voyage is, besides, a damp one, our pilot is at the mercy of the wind, and the vapor penetrating the thin garments suited to earth's equable climate, we are over glad to find ourselves again upon terra firma, frequenting its quiet waters and enjoying those substantial features of creation which we love and understand so well. Notwithstanding this disposition for short acquaintance with metaphysicians, we entertain respect for these "flying Deutchmen," and we are always grateful for ideas that are sufficiently intelligible to be instructive or suggestive.

We have said that Beauty is one of the oftenest selected themes for abstractive reasoning. M. Pictet says, in the commencement of his "Study of the Beautiful," that there is "nothing more obvious to feeling than the beautiful, and also that thought finds nothing more difficult to seize hold of. Every one knows, or thinks he knows, what is beautiful, but to the greatest number the why and the wherefore remains an enigmatical difficulty. There is nothing astonishing in this," and we think so too, for "the pure pleasure which accompanies the simple perception of the beautiful is obtained without effort, whilst the search for its principle demands the extreme of laborious thought. We willingly content ourselves, then, with the impression and the delight it gives us, and we even fortify ourselves against the reflection which comes to disturb and chill the sentiment." Every observer of

outward things who has looked inward will readily endorse the truth of the last sentence. But who will assert that we must enjoy feeling and ignore thinking? No M. Pictet, and not we, the writer, good reader. Feeling and thought are the two receptacles of a balance; the heart and the head are the equipoise weights, and God is the great inspector who tests their truth and keeps us from deceiving ourselves and others.

But to return to the author we quote from. He says, and truly too, that "for a long time, beginning with Plato"—whom, according to our own metaphor, we consider the greatest aeronaut that ever lived—"the theories of Beauty have been so abstract, so exclusively metaphysical, that they have frightened and repulsed all, especially artists and poets, who are devoted to its culture. Whenever these (artists and poets) have approached a theory, it has been done in the hope of finding aid for their practice and insight into the application of their art, and their disappointment has been very great upon discovering themselves in a labyrinth of subtle forms and pale generalities, which have furnished no kind of aliment to their imaginations." We know many an artist, many an amateur, many an embryo thinker, ready to give a hearty assent to this. We do not propose to follow M. Pictet in his thoughts consecutively, but quote here and there, as an idea appears worthy of quotation or comment. He does not seek to form a theory, and yet occasionally falls into a disposition to classify, which almost stamps him a theorist. What attracted us to M. Pictet is the following declaration, that—

"It is necessary to set definitions aside, and instead of Aristotle and Plato, go straight forward to the reality of things. We must shut the books of the philosophers, and try to read in the great book of nature which is open before us, and in the other great book—humanity, of which we are at the same time both the authors and readers. It will be time enough to see how others have interpreted their sublime texts after we shall have comprehended them our own way."

He goes on to say:—

"But to which of these two books shall we give our first attention? Both offer us an inexhaustible field of observation and research; both present themselves with equal authority. But the book of nature speaks and has always spoken the same language from the beginning of time, whilst the book of humanity has century after century revealed new ideas and new forms of expression. The first is shown to us as an unchangeable manifestation of unchangeable principles, the second appears to us like a thoughtful revelation, like the free creation of conscious power, master of itself and manifesting its development by progress. And more than this: these two books are not independent of one another. That of humanity is full of facts and citations borrowed from that of nature, to which it is everlastingly recurring; it imbibes there as if from its source, because it is, in fact, of more recent origin. The book of nature, then, is the first to be read, and there it is one must seek for a starting point to grasp the beautiful, embodied in its simplest and most elementary form."

* Metaphysics has been defined *l'art de s'égarer avec méthode* (the art of blundering methodically); no definition can be wittier or truer.—Leves.